

In print,
online and
on video...
life is still
very local



**Mark
EDWARDS**

Editor since 1996

NORTHAMPTON and the surrounding county has a long tradition of newspaper publishing and the *Chron* is proud to be at the heart of that tradition.

At a time when our website attracts around 50,000 visitors a month and our newsroom is preparing to branch out into video journalism, we are proud to celebrate the 75 years of serving our local communities that have passed since the first edition of the *Chronicle & Echo*.

Northamptonians were about the first in the country to be served by a local newspaper when the *Northampton Mercury* was first published in May 1720.

Still part of the *Chron's* Northamptonshire Newspapers stable the *Mercury* is going strong today and is Britain's oldest continuously published newspaper.

The town's two daily papers battled it out for years before finally being merged to form the *Chronicle & Echo* in 1931 and it is fascinating to hear the thoughts and memoirs of the first two editors on these pages.

Today the *Chronicle & Echo's* website is one of the county's busiest and our newsroom is equipped with the latest digital technology including video cameras.

On our website www.NorthamptonToday you can view a video report on the award-winning treetop walk in Salcey Forest by clicking on the information bar and scrolling down to the Salcey Forest link.

It is one of our early efforts at video supplements to our website but it is an indicator of the shape of things to come.

But still at the heart of our digital newsroom is the *Chronicle & Echo*, and our philosophy is as clear as ever... life is local.

We are proud of our news reporting tradition and some of the major recent events covered by your award-winning *Chron* are featured in this souvenir supplement.

But we are even more proud of our great local campaigns. The *Chron* and our amazing readers have helped countless projects and good causes over the years.

Most recently, in partnership with Barclaycard we gave away £40,000 in cash grants to local community projects.

The *Chron* joined forces with Macmillan Cancer Relief to raise £1.5million which was used to extend the oncology department at Northampton General Hospital and recently we completed a £1.5million appeal with Extracare to provide facilities at the new St Crispin retirement village.

There are many more local campaigns of which we are proud and although much has changed over the years as far as we at the *Chron* are concerned one thing will never change...

The most important people to us are our readers and the communities in which they live.

How it all



■ The first editor of the *Chronicle & Echo* William Cowper Barrons at his desk in 1931

Essential reading for news and views

WE asked the area's MPs to give us their views on the *Chronicle & Echo's* 75th anniversary...



Northampton without the *Chron* would be like *Strictly Come Dancing* without Bruce Forsyth! He sometimes gets on your nerves but he holds the whole thing together, and indeed, is a vital part of the process.

That is exactly what the *Chron* has been with regard to many aspects of Northampton life for

75 years.

Congratulations on a great record of public involvement and may the next 75 years prove just as successful for both the *Chron* and the town it serves.

Brian Binley MP
Northampton South



The *Chron* is integral to Northampton life. It holds a mirror up to our town and all of us who live here, reflects our joys and woes, records our big events, and provides an important forum for debate. For us elected politicians, it is part of our public accountability.

Long may it continue!

Sally Keeble MP, Northampton North

I have read the *Chronicle & Echo* for all my almost 20 years in Parliament, so am very pleased to send my best wishes on your 75th anniversary. It is essential reading for all those who want news or have views about our county – long may you continue doing so!

Tim Boswell MP, Daventry



There is a delicious irony in one of the *Chronicle and Echo's* ancestor papers being first with the news of Bonnie Prince Charlie's retreat in December 1746 and your now being owned by a Scottish company. What goes around, comes around but what is as true now as it was 75 years ago when the *Chronicle and Echo* started

life in Northampton, or 250 years ago when the then *Northampton Mercury* got its scoop, is that good journalism counts and it matters to your readers.

The essence of the local paper is its relevance and readability.

That's why the *Chron* is 75 and will live well beyond that.

Happy birthday and many congratulations.

Edward Garnier QC MP
Market Harborough



75 Years of your **Chronicle** & ECHO

begin

THE FIRST editor of Northampton's *Chronicle & Echo* left Leeds to take up his new position in Northampton in 1931 . . . faced with the chaos of pulling together a new newspaper from two local, evening papers.

The task to develop a newspaper from two publications *The Chronicle* and *The Echo* was not an easy one for William Cowper Barrons, whose first impressions of Northampton were far from favourable.

Forced to temporarily leave his wife behind in Leeds, he wrote to her: "It is just deadly being here at all. I spent two and a half hours in the Echo office listening to a lot of yap. Did nothing really.

"It has started to rain. Northampton is not so bright and cheerful that it can afford to do that. This not-knowing-a-soul business is the very devil."

But Northampton grew on William and he helped lay the foundation for a newspaper which has continued to survive and this year celebrates its 75th birthday.

The talented young William had already been editor at the Leeds-based Yorkshire Evening News for 12 years; a position he took over at the tender age of 27 for £500 a year.

Provincial Newspapers Ltd, which owned the News, bought Northampton's two rival evening papers and decided to combine them.

The board told Barrons it had been decided he would move to Northampton and four weeks later he was on the train.

Although he arrived in Northampton in September, William was dismayed to find out that the first edition would not be put out until November and that there had been no indication of what his salary was going to be.

He then moved into a residential hotel at 32 Kingsley Road, of which he wrote "No grouses. A beautiful room, good bed, good food, a dog, canaries, goldfish, tortoises on the lawn and clock golf too. Only seven minutes by bus."

But William stayed in Northampton and eventually made a success of the new paper, seeing it through the troubled times of World War Two.

His son John Barrons, who took over from his father as managing editor in 1959, said: "One thing they couldn't do in the war was locate in the newspaper the site of any bombings so the enemy wouldn't know if they had hit what they wanted to hit."

Although, one major story for the *Chron* during World War Two involved a British plane crashing down in the centre of town.

John said: "This British bomber had crashed in front of All Saints' Church. Its fuselage was in Gold Street and it still had bombs on board. It made quite a mess and that was a big event for the paper."

William also had an important part to play on the information



Anna BROSINAN

anna.brosnan@northantsnews.co.uk

committee for Northampton, which was given the task of liaising with the Government over the war-time messages to be put across to the people.

John said: "There was a lot of censorship. I still have some pieces of journalists' copy with sections blacked out because they weren't allowed to reveal locations."

Instead, when reporting on a bombing in the town, the newspaper was restricted to talking simply about "a Midlands town."

Although the war brought more news to Northamptonshire, paper rationing meant that news pages had to be cut down from the usual 12 to 16 down to four.

John said he remembered spending time in the Market Square office with his father, as a child, and seeing journalists tapping out stories on manual typewriters and sometimes even scribbling them out by hand; a world away from the computerised systems used today.

He said: "During the war there was a wonderful column in the *Mercury and Herald* by Mrs Field who we called Auntie Dick.

"She ran a children's circle in the *Mercury* for all the county folk. During the war they collected toys for distribution at Christmas and these were stored in the office and sometimes I got access to that."

He continued: "I started work at the *Chronicle & Echo* after school as a reporter and then I was seconded away to the USA on a newspaper exchange."

While working in Louisville, Kentucky, he sent back regular columns to be printed in the *Chron*.

When John later started work as editor at the *Chron* he had his own problems when one of the first major incidents he tackled was a mass pay strike of members of the National Union of Journalists for six weeks.

The remaining staff were forced to put together a single two-sided sheet of foolscap paper to distribute as a replacement *Chron* for a few weeks.

John said: "At 27 I was a very young manager and I can remember that just before the strike I got a new company car and I remember feeling a bit embarrassed about that."

John, who now lives in Northern Ireland, left the *Chron* in 1961 to take up a new position at the *Edinburgh Evening News*.

Nowadays the workings at the *Chronicle and Echo* are a far cry from the first days experienced by the Barrons. The *Chron* moved to The Mounts in 1978 to make way for the Grosvenor Centre development.

After a £20 million update between 2000 and 2002, today's press now prints the *Chron*, the *Mercury*, the *Evening Telegraph*, *Northants on Sunday* and a range of other papers from across the region.

Now the internet is a major part of the newspaper's operation, but in the 1950s the evolution of television made key changes to the role of the local paper.

John said: "I started in the business before the advent of television so a great change crept in from the early 1950s. Newspapers lost a lot of their big advertising deals, so then came the development of local adverts like classified which became a big part of the paper."

Congratulations message from Prince of Wales' office

THE Prince of Wales has joined those sending messages of congratulation to the *Chron* on reaching its 75th anniversary.

In a letter to editor Mark Edwards from Clarence House, his office passed on the congratulatory message. The Prince has been a great champion of local newspapers and in an interview during local Newspaper Week

the Prince said: "They are a vital part of our local communities, in helping to foster a sense of place and belonging and also ensuring that the countless good things being done by people in their local areas do not go unreported."



Congratulations from Northampton's Mayor

Congratulations to the *Chronicle & Echo* on your 75th birthday.

For all that time it has covered local issues, campaigning to get things changed and supporting different community groups on helping to change things in their areas. Of course it also reports on world news but not in a biased way.

I think the regular nostalgia articles are my favourites. I really enjoy reading them every night.
Colin Lill Mayor of Northampton



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■ John Barrons pictured in 1961 and today

